

## Review/Music; John Zorn and 'Cobra'

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Watching John Zorn conduct a performance of his "Cobra" at P.S. 122 on Friday evening, one was put in mind of a precocious brat let loose in a room full of fancy sound equipment, with a gang of his friends willing to follow his whims.

Like many of Mr. Zorn's works, "Cobra" (first performed in 1984) is a semi-improvisatory piece that draws its structure and substance from an elaborate set of rules rather than from a score. To direct the work, Mr. Zorn held up cards bearing symbols. What was performed was a function not only of the symbol, but also of how high Mr. Zorn held it, how quickly he lowered it, and whether he was wearing his baseball cap.

Mr. Zorn's 11 players also had a say in the work's direction. They raised their hands in the hope that Mr. Zorn would cue them for brief solos, and when chosen, they often pointed to other ensemble members, with whom they shared their solo moments in duo and trio configurations.

At times the work sounded like musique concrete, with disparate

sonic elements flying past in quick bursts. The band - which included electric guitars, electric violins, synthesizers, and a pair of turntables on which disks were manipulated to produce odd textures - veered from free-form jazz to fleeting patches of energetic rock-and-roll to bits of classical and folk fiddling.

There were generic pop references (piano figures common to 1950's rockers) and specific ones (the guitar riff from the Beatles' "I Feel Fine" made a few appearances), and there were barrages of dense, abrasive noise and air-raid-siren wailing.

At times, movements droned on too long, and there self-indulgent moments. But the work's saving grace was the underlying humor implicit in its governing rules and tangible in the often cartoonish playing.

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